

## 11. ATTEMPT BY THE CRESTED SERPENT-EAGLE *SPILORNIS CHEELA* TO SEIZE THE INDIAN COBRA *NAJA NAJA*

On May 26, 1999, Mr. Neelimkumar Khaire, Director, Katraj Snake Park, Pune informed me about an injured crested serpent-eagle *Spilornis cheela*. The eagle was found in the Katraj Ghat, about 10 km south of Pune. While patrolling the Ghat section, the traffic police officer Mr. B.S. Divekar was shocked to see a bird falling from the sky, right in front of his vehicle. The officer soon realised that it was some kind of 'shikari pakshi' i.e. a bird of prey. To his great surprise, the bird was entangled with a cobra (*Naja naja*). He took a stick and tried to drive off the cobra by beating it on its tail. The cobra immediately raised its hood and launched false attacks. However, after some time, it slowly unwound itself and disappeared into a nearby nullah. Although the eagle was not very badly injured, it was soaked in the rain and unable to move.

Mr. Divekar brought the eagle to the Katraj Snake Park, where there is a section for injured animals. While examining the eagle, we found that it had been superficially bitten under the left eye, clearly noticeable by the fang marks from

which some blood had oozed out and clotted. Two things struck me. In spite of its swiftness and ability to hunt snakes and lizards, this particular eagle could not manage its quarry efficiently. The snake managed to coil around the bird's wings in the air, making it lose control of its wings. The eagle was kept under careful observation in a cage. It was fed with small pieces of mutton, which it readily accepted. The need to give it snake antivenin was discussed. However, the shot was not given, as the eagle started showing signs of revival. To test the extent of the bird's revival, the Park management gave it small animal prey like chicken and guinea pig. The eagle immediately launched attacks and seized the prey. After having confirmed its ability to fly and physical fitness, the eagle was set free on July 9, 1999, by the Park authorities.

March 3, 2000

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## 12. BREEDING BY THE INDIAN COURSER *CURSORIUS COROMANDELICUS* IN WINTER IN RAIPUR, CHHATTISGARH, INDIA

On December 15, 1999, while bird watching, we visited the open wasteland (locally known as bhatas) near village Mand (Kharora), about 38 km on the Raipur-Balodabazar State Highway, district Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Apart from yellow-wattled lapwings (*Vanellus malabaricus*), ashy-crowned sparrow-larks (*Eremopterix grisea*) rufous-tailed finch-larks (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*) and Eurasian skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*), a flock of twenty Indian coursers (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) was also seen. At some distance from them, we sighted a solitary bird squatting on the open

ground. The bird did not move till the vehicle had approached close, whereas the other birds had already moved to considerable distances. This behaviour aroused our curiosity and we approached closer. Thereafter, the bird moved away reluctantly, exposing two eggs on its open, scraped ground nest. The bird in the nest and the exposed eggs were photographed. The area around the nest was extensively examined, but no other nest could be located.

Subsequently, the site was visited on January 12, 2000 when another hen brooding two eggs was seen about 40 m away from the

first nest. A week later, i.e. on January 19, 2000, a second abandoned nest was found; no hen or chicks were seen; the eggshells lying nearby were collected.

Another nest with a hen brooding a clutch of two eggs was located on January 19, 2000 about 25 m away. The breeding season of the species is March to August. (HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN; Ali, Sálim and S. Dillon Ripley, 1987, Vol. 3, Pp. 182). In this

case, the eggs were being hatched in December and January, suggesting that the species breeds in winter in this region.

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### 13. SIGHTING OF A RUFIOUS-NECKED STINT *CALIDRIS RUFICOLLIS* (PALLAS) IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA

On September 17, 1999, while observing a mixed flock of over 1,000 waders on the tidal mudflats of the alluvial Divar island in the inland-estuary of the Mandovi, Tiswadi tal, North Goa district, Goa, c.15 km up the mouth of the river, an odd wader caught our interest. For more than 15 minutes, we observed through 30 x 60 and 60 x 78 spotter-scopes, the mostly immobile bird and compared it with numerous curlew sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, little stints *C. minuta*, and broad-billed sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus* that were surrounding it.

**Plumage:** Virtually identical to little stint but markings less contrasting; pale V-shaped mark on mantle less distinct; crown less grizzled; buff wash on sides of breast stronger.

**Size:** Markedly longer than little stint; almost as large as broad-billed sandpiper, sometimes appearing as large as some of them. Distinctly stocky, plumper and heavier than the comparatively sleek little stint, like a half-grown red knot *C. canutus*.

Our observations of the plumage conform with those of Hayman *et al.* (1988) and Grimmett *et al.* (1998) for the non-breeding plumage of the rufous-necked stint which, however, are not conclusively identifying. It was the measurements that made us sure of the identity of this enigmatic wader.

TABLE I  
COMPARATIVE MEASUREMENTS OF SMALL WADERS

	Body length w/o bill (Hayman <i>et al.</i> 1988)	Average weight (Ali & Ripley)
Little stint	102-122, ave. 112 mm	20.6 g
Rufous-necked stint	112-142, ave. 127 mm	24.0 g
Broad-billed sandpiper	128-148, ave. 138 mm	32.2 g

The average weights given by Ali and Ripley (1983) might be misleading, since they were taken for each species in different seasons. However, Snow and Perrins (1998) state that the rufous-necked stint is, on an average, 30% heavier than the little stint. This, in connection with the rufous-necked stint's slightly shorter tarsus, accounts for the remarkable stockiness of the bird we had observed.

The rufous-necked stint, long considered conspecific with the little stint, is known to winter in SE Asia and Australasia, and in our region it is a scarce but regular winter visitor to the shores of Bangladesh and India's east coast. Our sighting is the first record of this species on the west coast.

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